



University of Maryland
CENTER FOR ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCE

UMCES Strategic Communications Plan

September 1, 2021

OVERVIEW

This Strategic Communications Plan presents a framework for managing and coordinating communication leading up to UMCES' centennial in 2025, laying the foundation for our second century of growth and impact. In order to reframe and streamline UMCES central communications to be more strategic and effective, it is necessary to establish a higher-level strategy to help focus how we engage with our audiences to strengthen the impact and reach of our current brand. In order to execute the Strategic Communications Plan, our organizational vision is to reframe the efforts of the Communications Office to formalize our focus on initiatives that are institutional in scope and in line with the UMCES statutory mission, UMCES Strategic Initiatives, and Presidential priorities. This work will allow the Communications office to be more proactive and effective and maximize resources for the most impact to elevate and sharpen vision of UMCES to external audiences.

This plan was developed with guidance from the UMCES' President's Office, the Vice President for Strategic Initiatives, and the UMCES Strategic Communications Work Group (see membership list attached).

OBJECTIVES

Establish a strategic focus for UMCES communications

Our vision is to focus the efforts of the Communications Office on initiatives that are institutional in scope and in line with the UMCES statutory mission, UMCES Strategic Initiatives, and Presidential priorities.

This includes developing, communicating, and overseeing implementation of a centralized communications strategy and goals.

Strengthen the impact and reach of our current brand/identity

Our efforts will be focused on sharpening and strengthening the impact and reach of our current brand, elevating UMCES and its renowned research as a whole rather than its constituent parts. This brand is well conveyed in the following representative statements from our Strategic Initiatives document grounded in UMCES' 2018 Environmental Summit:

UMCES is a global leader in understanding and solving major environmental challenges facing Maryland and the world.

UMCES leads the way toward better management of Maryland's natural resources and the protection and restoration of the Chesapeake Bay. We provide sound advice to help state and national leaders manage the environment and prepare future scientists to meet the global challenges of the 21st century.

Key messaging will serve as a framework for sharpening UMCES' public image and driving decision-making and priorities as part of this strategic communications plan to position **UMCES as a global leader in understanding and solving major environmental challenges facing Maryland and world**:

UMCES statutory mission:

The University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science has a unique statutory mandate to conduct a comprehensive scientific program and apply predictive ecology for the improvement and preservation of Maryland's physical environment. This mission is accomplished through **research, education, and public service.**

Four research themes associated with strategic initiatives:

- Maintain sustainable landscapes and seascapes
- Build coastal resilience
- Create healthy urban waterfronts
- Accelerate the science of changing oceans and climate

Institutional priorities:

- Transform lives through education
- Engage policymakers and communities
- Cultivate inclusivity, equity and diversity in a supportive environment
- Promote environmental entrepreneurship

Presidential Priorities

- UMCES' international reputation on research around the issue of climate change
- Predictive ecology/big data
- Efforts to increase the diversity in geosciences

Audiences

Although this plan does not address communication with all of the audiences below, this list represents the range of constituents that support or are supported by UMCES.

External Audiences

- Environmental managers; legislators; federal, state, and local regulatory agencies; peer institutions
- Existing and prospective funders, journalists, influencers, alumni
- Students and schools, educators, local organizations with connections to Chesapeake Bay, citizens with interest in science.

Internal Audiences

Internal stakeholders also have a role in promoting, supporting and achieving the UMCES Mission. Those stakeholders include: faculty, staff, students, and the Board of Visitors.

Identify key stories and storytellers to support and illustrate a one-UMCES framing

Compelling stories, including resonant voices that connect our work to things that our audiences care about, will be indispensable. It will be very important for us to be thoughtful and creative in identifying the resources and assets— information, personnel, images, stories— that we can use to build a compelling public narrative. This signals moving away from a treadmill of press releases about publications and treating all news equally to being more targeted about communications that sharpen UMCES' image and reputation and promote ongoing value of the research and impact. This includes elevating faculty and their expertise through focused media introductions and training faculty and graduate students to communicate effectively with the public about their research in support of UMCES' brand and mission.

Invigorate stakeholders

The most powerful and underutilized tool that any university has is the network of stakeholders to be found in current students, alumni, faculty, staff, and community partners. Members of the UMCES

community can affect our reputation and effective communication is everyone's responsibility. This plan includes communicating clear brand position and messaging to current and future UMCES faculty and staff to empower them to become brand ambassadors. This may be achieved through a quarterly Communications roundtable about branding, marketing and communication strategies, improvements to the on-boarding process for faculty and staff, and enhancement of communications resources on the website and outreach to the UMCES community about them.

Refine communications outlets

Environmental Insights e-newsletter

Leverage and strengthen *Environmental Insights* as our primary tool for keeping our entire alumni and donor base up-to-date on important university developments and accomplishments.

Website

Redesign of the website is required with sunset of support for the current platform at the end of 2022. This is an opportunity to sharpen our presence online for external audiences around our mission and key communications goals. With limited communications and website support staff, it is necessary to reconstruct the website in a way that makes it easy to update and maintain and address institutional security risks.

Social Media

Revise a social media strategy focused on strengthening reputation and engagement around key priorities and ensuring all owners of UMCES social channels across various units have the appropriate tools to create a dialogue consistent with university strategy. See attached.

Establish processes that enhance efficiency and coordination

Our goal is to establish new structures, venues, and protocols to improve information flow into and out of the Communications office and to support effective implementation of annual communications strategy. An optimally operating Communications Office will receive fuller information about UMCES activities, receive that information faster, and have greater ability to discern which activities are or will be most strategically important.

Sharpen role of UMCES Communications Office

Historically, UMCES' Public Relations have largely served a campus support function with the majority of time spent providing press releases, media relations support, and website and social media assistance on request. Effective implementation of a proactive, annual communications strategy will require a Communications Office with the capacity and authority to prioritize the strategy's key elements. This will require refining the Director of Communications job description and expectations to more accurately represent the scope and duties of the role and establishing protocols for managing requests for the Communications Office, which has limited staff resources in comparison to the breadth of activities it oversees. (see appendix) The office needs its communications to be resourceful and efficient while achieving multiple goals.

Improve information gathering/distribution

To improve the flow of information into and out of the Communications Office, this plan requires refining and updating procedures for sharing, including implementing a news request protocol to streamline and define expectations, clarify decision-making process, introduce alternative pathways for research promotion, and manage workload. This includes encouraging advance notice of potential news to allow for a more strategic and targeted outreach process and relies on the contributor for compelling information so the office can make the best decision on prioritizing and distributing news.

APPENDIX

Office of Communications Structure

Director of Strategic Communications

The University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science's Office of Communications is responsible for helping shape and execute overarching communications strategy for the institution and advance key priorities of the President and Board of Visitors and Office of Strategic Initiatives. This includes managing the daily operation of the University's central communications channels (including the website, press releases, e-newsletters, and social media accounts), guiding the University's media engagement; maintaining brand; managing and mitigating reputational risk; and providing campus partners with strategic communications counsel. Serves as primary point of contact for all central communication initiatives related to centralized messaging and communications, reputation management and crisis communications. Collaborates and provides overall communications direction with other outreach units and partners closely to ensure the integrity of one voice for UMCES.

This position supervises the Digital Content Coordinator.

Digital Content Coordinator

- manages the website, UMCES.edu, which highlights information about the University and its key endeavors in research, public policy and education, including maintaining style and brand, adding stories and pages, and assisting faculty, students, and staff to updating their pages
- manages UMCES' official communications channels, such as the website and social media channels (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, LinkedIn), and creates content that drives engagement with our audiences.
- writes stories about research and faculty/students/staff for website
- coordinates and distribute the monthly [Environmental Insights](#) e-newsletter
- manages Constant Contact mailing database and development of email templates
- manage digital assets, including logos and photography

UMCES Strategic Communications Working Group Membership List

Chairs:

Stuart Clarke, Vice President for Strategic Initiatives

Amy Pelsinsky, Director of Communications

External Working Group Members:

PAUL ALLEN, *Senior Vice President, M.J. Bradley & Associates; UMCES Board of Visitors*

VICKI ARROYO, *Executive Director, Georgetown Climate Center*

JANA DAVIS, *Executive Director, Chesapeake Bay Trust*

JOE FARRIN, *Managing Director, Porter Novelli; UMCES Board of Visitors*

RACHEL FELVER, *Director of Communications, Chesapeake Bay Program*

DAWN STOLTZFUS, *Senior Vice President, The Hatcher Group*

LISA TOSSEY, *Assistant Director of Communications, Maryland Sea Grant*

Internal Working Group Members:

MATT FITZPATRICK, *Associate Professor, Appalachian Laboratory*

MATT GRAY, *Assistant Professor, Horn Point Laboratory*

LAUREN JONAS, *Graduate Research Assistant, Institute of Marine & Environmental Technology*

HEATH KELSEY, *Program Director, Integration & Application Network*

HADLEY MCINTOSH, *Graduate Program Alumna*

DAVE NEMAZIE, *Chief of Staff*

ELIZABETH NORTH, *Associate Professor, Horn Point Laboratory*

ANGELA RICHMOND, *Director, ORAA*